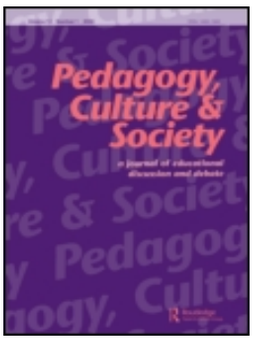

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Equity and Choice: the paradox of New Zealand educational reform

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ABSTRACT Recent educational reforms in New Zealand have been deeply paradoxical in their concurrent pursuit of both equity and choice as social goals. Curriculum reform has been primarily concerned with equity, whereas the restructuring of educational administration has been concerned with increasing choice. The conflicting ethical frameworks have produced a tension between substantive policies justified in terms of social justice and correlative procedural policies derived from an ideological commitment to market-liberalism. This tension is evidenced in three different types of policy: regulative, distributive and redistributive. Examples of each are examined to show how the conflicting ideological positions are manifested.

Introduction: the context of reform

Public education in New Zealand has much in common with that of other Western societies, with strong influences coming from Great Britain and North America. As a member country within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) New Zealand compares its social policies and institutions with those of other capitalist or mixed economies throughout the world. While such comparisons are useful to policy-makers and of considerable interest to policy-analysts, it is important also to identify those features and traditions that are unique to the New Zealand context.

In March 1982, a panel of examiners appointed by the OECD visited New Zealand and carried out an extensive review of education policy. In

particular, the examiners were asked to consider post-secondary education and its relationship with the school system and working life.

In general, the report of the OECD examiners presented a positive view of the New Zealand education system. They paid special attention to the processes that exist for consultation and participation in the formulation and implementation of policy. However, they recognised also that New Zealand is a plural society, "with a plurality of educational purposes and aspirations" (OECD, 1983, p. 13). The examiners identified a number of problems confronting educational administrators and they pointed to some areas where policy initiatives were urgently needed (e.g. senior school curriculum) and others where more extended debate would be beneficial (e.g. adult and continuing education). Overall, the report endorsed the major policy directions of the system at that time and argued that increased government expenditure in education was justified.

During the early 1980s, the overall level of government expenditure on education increased steadily and successive governments focused attention on the area of curriculum reform, culminating in *The Curriculum Review*, which was initiated by the fourth Labour government after its election in 1984.

The Curriculum Review was a massive and costly two-year exercise in community consultation and extensive debate about the aims and purposes of education. The final document, released in April 1987, proposed 15 basic principles from which a national common curriculum would be developed. It was proposed that such a curriculum would be: common to all schools; accessible to every student; non-racist and non-sexist; able to ensure significant success for all students; whole; balanced; of the highest quality for every student; planned; co-operatively designed; responsive, inclusive, enabling, enjoyable. The document was received favourably by many in the education community as heralding a major educational reform. Conservative groups, however, were either openly critical of its ideology or expressed strong reservations about the feasibility of its recommendations.

The New Zealand Treasury was especially critical of the review, declaring that it would not prove an adequate blueprint for developing school education because it:

> *(i) held unstated and narrow assumptions as to the nature and sources of education;*
> *(ii) overlooked issues as to: community and educational values and benefits, the relationship between education and the economy, and the nature of government assistance; and*
> *(iii) did not tackle issues of management and consumer choice.*
> *(Memorandum to Minister of Finance, 19 May 1987)*

The Treasury analysis, however, was never put to the test because the review was overtaken by two landmark events. The first was the establishment of the Taskforce to Review Education Administration in June 1987, just two months after *The Curriculum Review* was released.

The other was the general election in August 1987, which returned labour to government but saw a change of Education Minister with the Prime Minister taking over the portfolio. This ushered in the 'moment' of educational administration reform and the consigning of curriculum reform to the 'backburner'.

The Taskforce to Review Education Administration was chaired by a prominent businessman and supermarket magnate, Brian Picot. Its terms of reference set an agenda in which two concepts were prominent; devolution and efficiency. All matters relating to curriculum and the nature of teaching and learning were explicitly excluded. The Taskforce was specifically asked to "identify any costs and benefits of its recommendations and recommend the nature and timing of any necessary transitional arrangements" (Taskforce, 1988, p. ix).

The Picot Report was released on 10 May, 1988, with proposals for the most radical restructuring of the educational system in 100 years. Significantly, however, the report made almost no reference to the curriculum and *The Curriculum Review* is not mentioned once. An incredibly short period (6-7 weeks) was given for submissions on the report and on 7 August the Minister released a white paper, *Tomorrow's Schools*, and announced that the restructuring would be implemented by 1 October 1989.

The main thrust of the restructuring has been to reduce the size of the central bureaucracy, to abolish regional education boards, and to convert each learning institution into a self-managing unit having its own elected board of trustees. Thus, the new educational structure entails a devolution of decision-making in a wide range of administrative areas, including resource allocation, staff appointments, support services and staff development. Boards of trustees are given some discretion in these areas but control is firmly invested in central state agencies, including the Ministry of Education, the Education Review Office and the Qualifications Authority. This control is maintained through tightly circumscribed limits on local autonomy and contractual forms of accountability.

In many ways, the *Tomorrow's Schools* reform parallels the recent *Education Reform Act* (1988) in Britain. Although the social context is different, the political circumstances have been strikingly similar. In both cases, governments have undertaken major restructuring of the education system, with very little scope for consultation or public discussion, in order to gain much more political control over the system. In both cases this has been done under the rhetorical banners of decentralisation and market freedom. However, in both Britain and New Zealand the reforms have produced more centralised control over crucial political areas such as the curriculum, the teaching profession and general education expenditure. The paradox is that these policies have been legitimated by a rhetoric that has proclaimed individual freedom, parent power and consumer choice.

One of the most deeply paradoxical features of the recent educational restructuring in New Zealand has been the apparent commitment to the social goals of both equity and choice in the pursuit of greater efficiency. On the face of it, such goals have an immediate persuasive force. New Zealanders have taken justifiable pride in seeking to construct an education system based upon fairness in the distribution of resources and equality in the provision of opportunities. Likewise, the promotion of choice seems to be consistent with a long tradition of democratic values and respect for individual differences. One might well ask, therefore, why it is paradoxical to pursue the dual goals of choice and equity and why the educational reform agenda of the fourth labour government became impaled on the horns of this particular dilemma.

The following discussion addresses these questions by examining some of the post-Picot educational reforms, considering their actual or likely empirical effects and relating these to the philosophical claims from which they derive their putative justification. It is argued that there is a fundamental philosophical tension between the substantive policies that can be justified in terms of social justice and the correlative procedural policies derived from an ideological commitment to market-liberalism. This tension is evidenced in three different types of policy: regulative, distributive and redistributive. Examples of each are examined to show how the conflicting ideological positions are manifested. Finally, it is suggested that the instrumentalism that pervades current education policy-making exacerbates these inherent contradictions and should be replaced by a policy formation process based on principles of collective responsibility and social justice.

The Influence of Market-liberalism

During the 1980s most advanced industrial societies witnessed a strong resurgence of economic and political liberalism. It is a movement that began in Western capitalist states as a response to the economic difficulties of the 1970s and now, in some ways, has its counterpart in the recent democratisation of the Eastern Bloc.

The central tenet of this movement is the subordination of state intervention to the operation of market mechanisms as a more effective way of promoting economic growth and a more efficient means of allocating and using scarce resources (King, 1987). The maximisation of individual choice within a deregulated social environment is given priority over state imposed responsibilities, duties and obligations. Property rights are given priority over social citizenship or welfare rights, and economic efficiency is given priority over human need in the allocation of resources.

A resurgence of market-liberalism, accompanied by adherence to monetarist economic policies, occurred in the USA under the Reagan administration, in Britain under the Thatcher government and, more recently, in New Zealand under the Lange-Douglas government (Easton,

1989; Holland & Boston, 1990). In each case, the main effect has been to 'roll back' the state (deregulation, privatisation), to foster a climate of competition (the so-called 'enterprise culture') and to set aside most of the traditional concern for social justice in the political reform agenda.

Much has been written already about the influence of market-liberalism, or 'New Right' ideology, on the educational policies of New Zealand's fourth labour government (Lauder, 1987; Boston, 1987; Codd et al, 1988; Nash, 1989; Middleton et al, 1990; Lauder & Wylie, 1990; Snook, 1990). To date, however, there has been little analysis of these policies in terms of their internal logical coherence and ethical justification. Such analysis needs to begin with the documents that have preceded or accompanied the policies. By examining the assumptions behind this discourse and exposing its internal contradictions, we are able to evaluate the policies themselves in terms of their likely or potential social effects.

For example, in the 1987 Treasury Brief to the incoming government, the rhetoric of market-liberalism is used with considerable force to defend policies that if implemented would substantially reduce the state's role as the principal provider of education. The authors of this Treasury document take the view that state intervention in education is neither equitable nor efficient. Although the evidence they give for this view is both equivocal and inconclusive, they go further to assert that such intervention for equity purposes would probably "produce effects that reduce rather than further some kinds of equity" (Treasury, 1987, p. 39). This assertion then becomes the major premise from which to advocate policies that would enable education to enter the marketplace and thus lead to increased choice amongst its consumers.

As the reform agenda unfolded, the promotion of choice was to become one of the central policy objectives – a key that would presumably unlock all that is both desired and desirable in education. The Picot Taskforce, for instance, proclaim "choice" as the first of their core values and state that this "will involve providing a wider range of options both for consumers and for learning institutions" (Taskforce, 1988, p. 4). Moreover, they "see the creation of more choice in the system as a way of ensuring greater efficiency and equity" (ibid.). The promotion of choice as a primary social objective, and the reference to parents or learners as "consumers", clearly locates these statements within a market-liberal discourse that connects the New Zealand education reforms with those that have occurred elsewhere (Ball, 1990).

Chester Finn, educational adviser to the Reagan administration and one of the vanguard in the so-called 'excellence movement' in the USA, claims that parental choice is a direct form of accountability. People, in his words, "will voluntarily exit from bad schools and head for good ones" (Finn, 1989, p. 28). Such a comment undoubtedly has common-sense plausibility and after pointing out the unquestionable desirability of engaging parents more deeply in the education of their children, Finn continues as follows:

> *Educational choice, moreover, by fostering competition among schools, will itself lead to diversity and individuality. In addition, choice can widen opportunities for disadvantaged and minority youngsters by giving them access to educational options not available in their immediate neighbourhoods. (Ibid.)*

Those who hold to market-liberalism, do so with a faith that is blind to social reality. The assumption here is that making choice available is exactly the same as enabling all people to choose. Given the choice between a 'good' school and a 'bad' school, any rational parent would always choose a 'good' school for their children. But so-called 'good' schools are only perceived as such when they can be distinguished from another group of schools that are perceived to be 'bad'. It is not possible, moreover, for all parents to be in comparable social positions from which to choose between 'good' and 'bad' schools. Some will have available to them more financial and cultural resources than others and their very choice of what they perceive to be a 'good' school becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Thus, the exercise of choice by some becomes a capacity to determine what is good, and therefore limits for others the opportunity to choose. Ruth Jonathan has argued that this follows from the nature of education as a 'positional' social good, which she defines as: "the sort of good whose worth to those who have it depends to some extent both on its general perceived value and on others having less of it" (Jonathan, 1989, p. 333).

Recent British legislation (Education Reform Act, 1988) has enabled schools to opt out of local authority control if a majority of parents so determine by ballot. Describing the effects of this and other policies extending parental choice, Ruth Jonathan argues that:

> *...it is probable that some schools will get better and others worse, with those parents who are most informed and articulate influencing and obtaining the 'best buy' for their children, thus giving a further twist to the spiral of cumulative advantage which results when the state is rolled back to enable 'free and fair' competition between individuals or groups who have quite different starting points in the social race. (Jonathan, 1989, p. 323)*

The conclusion that this points to is that the promotion and enhancement of consumer opportunity and choice in education can be achieved only with a consequential cost in terms of social justice. In a more recent paper, Jonathan maintains that:

> *...in the distribution of a 'positional' good such as education, measures to increase individual opportunity bring about a decrease in social justice and lead to a head-on clash between two commonly accepted duties of the state: to maximise individual freedom and to promote justice for the group as a*

> *whole – this clash being exacerbated in direct proportion to the resultant increase in social competition. (Jonathan, 1990, p. 16)*

Thus, policies that promote educational choice, such as the removal of zoning regulations, have the effect not only of extending individual liberties but of ensuring that rational consumers will tend to use them to pursue their self-interest. When parents do this on behalf of their children, their actions have a *prima facie* moral justification. We expect parents to look after their children's interests. However, this overlooks other social realities relating to the scarcity of educational resources. Jonathan's argument, therefore, shows that policies that increase the discretionary power of educational consumers give priority to individual liberty over social justice.

This identifies the policy dilemma that lies at the heart of New Zealand's education reforms. Fundamentally, it is a dilemma in which two conflicting ethical frameworks are called upon to justify different elements of the same overall set of reform policies.

Conflicting Ethical Frameworks

The ethical theory that underlies market-liberalism can be recognised as a form of utilitarianism. In terms of this theory, a moral decision is justified if it produces the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people. Such happiness is calculated in terms of the consequences for society as a whole, rather than the consequences for any particular individuals or groups within the society. Thus, in the distribution of a good such as education, utilitarianism would seek to maximise the average distribution even if the disparities were wider as a result. Efficiency, according to a utilitarian ethic, means that as many people as possible get more of what they want even if some end up getting less. This may be achieved by increasing both opportunities for choice and competition among individuals.

Education, in market-liberal utilitarian terms, is considered to be a *preferred good*, that is something we expect some to want and others not to want. It is something we choose or earn and because it involves the acquisition of marketable skills, it does not differ essentially from other exchangeable commodities. Such preferred goods do not produce positive externalities or benefits to others apart from those who receive them.

The distributive principle within a utilitarian framework is that of utility, which means that a preferred good such as education is distributed so as to gain optimal average benefits for all, even if the least advantaged become worse off. This entails an ethical position that differs in a number of essential ways from the social justice ethic that has traditionally informed educational policy-making. The major differences between these two ethical frameworks are summarised in Table I.

	Market-liberal utilitarianism	Social justice as fairness
Primary social objective	Choice	Equity
What is distributed?	Education as a preferred good (exchangeable commodity)	Education as a primary social good
Distributive principle	Utility (optimal average benefits for all – even if disparities are wider)	Fairness (inequalities are justified only if they benefit those who are disadvantaged)
Main criterion for resource allocation	Efficiency (invest to maximise aggregate gains)	Need (invest to improve opportunities for least advantaged)
Major educational outcome	Increased educational productivity	Fairer distribution of educational benefits
Major social effect	Disproportionate acquisition of resources by most advantaged (profit by some)	Redistribution of benefits by limiting choice (welfare for all)

Table I. Ethical frameworks for educational policy.

Social justice as fairness refers to an ethical framework in which equity is given priority over choice as the primary social objective. In its simplest form, equity is taken to mean 'redress', that is, giving more to the less advantaged. Social justice, however, as Rawls (1972) argues, requires a much more subtle concept of equity. In developing his very influential theory of justice, Rawls posits two principles.

The first principle is that:

> *each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all. (Rawls, 1972, p. 250)*

The second principle, which he calls "the difference principle" is stated as follows:

> *Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity. (Ibid., p. 83)*

The application of these principles to education would mean that resources were to be allocated "so as to improve the long-term expectation of the least favoured" (ibid., p. 101) rather than simply evening out existing inequalities or improving the economic efficiency of the system. Because education is necessary to the very formation of people's wants, it constitutes what Rawls calls a *primary good* (ibid.,

p. 62). This is a substantially different conception of education from that assumed by market-liberal utilitarianism.

Primary social goods are things that all reasonable people would want because without them they cannot even choose the kind of life they would want. For example, reasonable people would want to be able to participate in decisions that affect their welfare, and to be able to develop skills and acquire knowledge necessary to participate in the political and economic institutions of society. Education, in these terms, becomes defined as a basic human right. It is not something we can simply choose to have from a position of not having it. Education is not something we simply acquire: it changes who we are.

Rawls argues that a just society is one in which primary goods are distributed fairly, according to people's needs. This implies that:

> *... resources for education are not to be allotted solely or necessarily mainly according to their return as estimated in productive trained abilities, but also according to their worth in enriching the personal and social life of citizens, including here the less favoured. (Ibid., p. 107)*

Within this view, educational policies are justified by the extent to which they produce a fairer distribution of educational benefits, rather than in terms of economic efficiency or improved consumer choice. Social justice obligates the state to invest in education, not to maximise the gains for all, nor to allow some to profit at the expense of others, but rather to safeguard conditions of welfare for all and where necessary to limit the choice of some in order to redistribute the benefits more fairly.

This view contrasts strongly with the market-liberal position in which the state invests in education to improve the overall productive capacity of its citizens. The aim of market-liberalism is to achieve a maximum return on investment. Where this involves an unequal distribution of resources, it is based upon the ability of people to profit from those resources and it is assumed that the resulting increased productivity eventually will provide benefits for all. However, this 'trickle-down' theory of economic and social justice, which is commonly used in defence of market-liberal policies, does not bear closer ethical scrutiny. As Ronald Dworkin points out:

> *Children denied adequate nutrition or any effective chance of higher education will suffer permanent loss even if the economy follows the most optimistic path of recovery. Some of those who are denied jobs and welfare now, particularly the elderly, will in any case not live long enough to share in that recovery however general it turns out to be. (Dworkin, 1985, p. 209)*

Dworkin argues that market-liberal utilitarianism, which "attempts to justify irreversible losses to a minority in order to achieve gains for the large majority" (ibid.) is contrary to the principle that people must be treated with equal concern. Thus, the utilitarian ethic, which gives priority to the maximisation of people's opportunity to have what they

happen to want, denies the principle of equity that is central to social justice as fairness.

The importance of these philosophical points in the formation of educational policy cannot be emphasised enough. For when policies are based upon market-liberal assumptions, yet at the very same time are advanced in the name of equity and social justice, the effects will be inevitably paradoxical. In the next section this is demonstrated by reference to a number of key policy proposals contained within the New Zealand education reforms.

Substantive and Procedural Educational Policies

The point was made earlier that market-liberalism has had a major influence on all areas of New Zealand government policy since the election of the fourth labour government in 1984. Its influence on education, however, was not apparent until 1987 when the government set out to reform education administration. At this time, the strongest advocacy for the market-liberal view of education came from the government's treasury officials, members of the Business Round Table and the National Party's election manifesto (Grace, 1990). Following the return of the government in the 1987 election, giving an apparent mandate for its market-liberal reforms, these ideas began to materialise in the form of specific policy proposals. At the same time, however, some important aspects of the government's education policies were being developed within a more traditional social justice framework. Consequently, the education reforms are fraught with serious internal contradictions.

At this point, Anderson's (1979) distinction between substantive and procedural policies is useful. Substantive policies are concerned with the nature and substance of educational provision and include any policy that directly embodies an educational aim, purpose or rationale. Procedural policies, on the other hand, are concerned with administrative structures and include any policy that determines how educational provisions are to be controlled or distributed. In what follows, it is argued that whereas the substantive education policies of the recent reforms were initially based largely upon a social justice ethic, many of the procedural policies are clear manifestations of market-liberal utilitarianism. This can be demonstrated by a further elaboration of Anderson's distinction.

Substantive policies pertain directly to the form and/or content of education. They state "what government is going to do" (Anderson, 1979, p. 126) to modify or develop an aspect of the education system in particular ways. Curriculum and assessment policies are obvious examples, as are all policies aimed at extending or modifying the form of educational provision. The setting of both national and local curriculum objectives, the provision of special education and teacher advisory

services, and the involvement of parents and communities in curriculum development, can all be defined as substantive policies.

Procedural policies are concerned with how substantive policies are to be implemented. They relate to the question of "who is going to take action or how it is going to be done" (Anderson, 1979, p. 126). Prunty (1984, p. 5) suggests that "an understanding of procedural policy is especially important for identifying the bases of power and control that shape the substantive content of policy". Within *Tomorrow's Schools*, the policy that each institution have control over its educational resources, that it have an approved charter and undergo regular external review, is a clear example of a procedural policy (Minister of Education, 1988). Recent moves to abolish school zoning and to introduce competition amongst providers of various services (i.e. contestability) are also examples.

Educational policies are further distinguished by Anderson (1979, pp. 127-131) on the basis of whether they are regulatory, distributive or redistributive. Table II presents examples of each of these three types of educational policy.

	Regulatory	Distributive	Redistributive
Substantive policies (social justice)	National and local curriculum objectives	Special education and general advisory services	Parent participation Equity requirements
Procedural policies (market liberal)	Parental choice Abolition of school zoning schemes Opting-out provisions	Contestability of services	School-based management with equity funding

Table II. Substantive and procedural education policies.

Regulatory policies involve the imposition or the removal of rules or limitations controlling the actions of various agents within the education system. These policies either increase or reduce the freedom or discretion to act of those individuals or groups who are thus regulated. Such policies are pervasive within a state education system and they define or control both the content and the distribution of education. Some regulatory policies are substantive, for example, the requirement for all charters to contain clear statements of national and local objectives. Other regulatory policies are procedural, for example, the imposition (or removal) of zoning restrictions, the various regulations governing parental choice, and the provision for setting up alternative schools, or for taking up the home schooling option.

School zoning is always a contentious area of policy because of its immediate effects on parental choice (McCulloch, 1990). It is not surprising, therefore, that its role within the restructuring has been

highly problematic. The market-liberal view is obviously opposed to any form of zoning regulations. Increased parental choice of schools, however, inevitably leads to competition. As Ruth Jonathan points out:

> *Whereas, therefore,* ***individual parents*** *may acquire enhanced opportunities to benefit their children, it is also the case that* ***parents as a category of individuals*** *find the welfare of their children placed at increased risk in a climate of intensified competition. (Jonathan, 1990, p. 19)*

The tension here between market-liberalism and social justice becomes very obvious. This tension is also evident in other types of policy.

Distributive policies "are those in which resources are allocated to assist particular groups, and where those seeking benefits are not in direct competition with each other" (Prunty, 1984, p. 5). Most educational developments within the state schooling system have resulted from substantive distributive policies of this kind. Universal primary schooling, free secondary schooling and expanded university education have all developed from substantive distributive policies. Within the recent restructuring of education, two areas of distributive policy that have been particularly problematic are the special education and general advisory services. It is not the substance of these policies, but the procedural aspects that have been contentious.

The Picot Report initially proposed that all of the funding for the advisory services and 60% of the special education support become contestable with funding "allocated to schools so that they can buy the services they want" (Taskforce, 1988, p. 74). This proposal was modified in *Tomorrow's Schools* so that the general advisory services would continue with central funding for two years and would then be "reviewed by the ministry with a view to moving to full cost recovery" (Minister of Education, 1988, p. 29). For special education advisers, 20% of the funding was to be contestable for an initial two-year period after which there would be 100% funding through bulk grants to institutions. Clearly, the aim of this procedural policy is to increase choice and improve efficiency through competition. Predictably, it was vigorously contested by education groups who considered that it would lead to an inequitable availability and distribution of services for schools in some areas. The government therefore deferred its implementation. However, in May 1990, when the Lough Committee published its review of the reform process, it stated unequivocally with reference to the teachers advisory services "that a mechanism should be devised for making these services contestable at the earliest possible date" (Lough Report, 1990, p. 10). Again, what can be discerned here is a conflict between a substantive policy based on social justice and a procedural policy derived from market liberalism.

Redistributive policies are policies that involve "deliberate efforts ... to shift the allocation of wealth, income, property or rights among broad classes or groups of the population" (Anderson, 1979, p. 130). Such

policies aim to redress the biases within the schooling system that work in favour of some groups and against others. The substantive nature of redistributive policies that aim to reduce inequalities inevitably locates them within a social justice framework. The correlative procedural policies, however, may work to cancel out the positive effects of redistribution, especially where there is competition for limited resources.

The main substantive element in the restructuring of education is undoubtedly the participation of parents in educational decision-making. The Picot Taskforce stated that

> *We feel that parents want to be involved more fully in various facets of the education of their children and the overall direction of our proposals is to encourage this. (Taskforce, 1988, p. 4)*

That the proposed reforms were intended by the taskforce to be redistributive is clear from the following statement:

> *We are also strongly of the view that any savings that result from a more efficient administrative structure should be retained within education – so that learners can receive the maximum individual and social benefit within a fair and just education system. (Ibid., p. 6-7)*

Although the word 'equity' hardly appears in the Picot Report, this was to feature prominently in the *Tomorrow's Schools* document where the equity objectives of the new structure are stated as:

> • *To ensure that a new system of education administration promotes and progressively achieves greater equity for women, Maori, Pacific Island, other groups with minority status; and for working class, rural and disabled students, teachers and communities.*
> • *To ensure that equity issues are integrated into all aspects of changes in education administration and not treated as an optional extra.*
> • *To acknowledge that the present system of education administration includes some features which promote equity and which should not be lost as a result of changes.*
> • *To recognise that equity is best achieved through systems which combine enabling legislation with awareness and education.*
> • *To ensure that the systems which are put in place enable the monitoring of progress towards equity goals. (Minister of Education, 1988, p. 25)*

The major procedural policy proposed to achieve these objectives entails school-based administration by boards of trustees. Decision-making in all key areas of resource management is devolved to the school level and accountability is ensured by each institution having an approved charter which sets out the equity requirements the new structure is expected to meet. All funding comes to each institution as a bulk grant that is based

on its own separate funding formula which may be weighted for equity considerations.

This procedural policy has many features of market-liberalism that work against the equity objectives spelled out in the *Tomorrow's Schools* policy. Because considerable discretion is granted to individual institutions, there is no way of ensuring that resources are being justly distributed. The removal of formal administrative structures from the local and district level produces a situation in which schools compete with each other for available resources. The formula for determining equity funding relies upon data about students' backgrounds that schools themselves must provide and inevitably cut-off points prove to be somewhat arbitrary. It is the combined effects of these 'market' conditions which tend to increase the inequalities of educational provision and opportunity.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion has drawn attention to a disjuncture between the substantive educational policies pursued by the fourth New Zealand labour government and the procedural policies embedded within the new educational structures. While many of the substantive policies could be justified in terms of social justice as fairness, the correlative procedural policies, based on market-liberal assumptions, effectively subverted the social justice agenda in favour of non-interference individual freedoms. Thus, when a new conservative government with little commitment to social equity was elected in October 1990, it became relatively easy to move even further in the direction of market-liberalism without the necessity for further restructuring.

What is being witnessed in New Zealand education in the early 1990s is a crisis of confidence – not in the teaching profession or its leaders, but in the political system itself. Not only has the pace of change been frenetic, but the process at times has been a travesty of democracy and there has been almost no concern to evaluate the effects of change. In rhetorical terms, the educational reforms have been concerned with parent participation in education, with providing clear and specific objectives for all learning institutions, with promoting learner achievement and increasing the productivity of teachers, and with ensuring that learning institutions are responsive and flexible. Undoubtedly, there has been a positive side, but too much has been sheer rhetoric. In reality, the same reforms can be seen to be fostering a climate of harmful competition amongst schools, promoting unfair degrees of parental choice, exacerbating inequalities between communities, and promoting disparities in resources for special needs and teacher support. These are the consequences of political actions that have been intent on taking education into the marketplace, where competition and individual choice can reign supreme.

Since 1990, the present government has moved to abolish school zoning, to make teacher registration voluntary, to increase financial aid to private schools, to promote bulk-funding of teachers' salaries, and to move special education and teacher support services towards more contestable modes of delivery. All of these are moves towards the marketisation of education under the banner of increased choice, and they are all moves that are alien to the social justice tradition of New Zealand education, although they connect with reforms occurring elsewhere.

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